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C O N F I D E N T I A L HILLAH 000384

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [KISL](#) [IZ](#)

SUBJECT: SISTANI-AFFILIATED CLERIC ASSASSINATED IN NAJAF; IRAQI
POLICE RAID OFFICE OF SADRIST SHAYKH

CLASSIFIED BY: ALFRED FONTENEAU, REGIONAL COORDINATOR, REO,
AL-HILLAH, STATE.

REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

11. (C) Summary: Unidentified gunmen assassinated Sayyid Fattah Al-Thabhwawi, a mid-level Shi'a cleric affiliated with Grand Ayatollah Ali Al-Sistani, on December 26. The cleric, who also was aligned with the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI), was shot outside his home in the Al-Makroma quarter of Najaf city as he left for his office at a Sistani-funded Shi'a theological research and publishing house. Iraqi Police (IP) are reportedly investigating the involvement in the killing of both Sunni insurgents from outside Najaf and a Najaf-based ayatollah affiliated with Moqtada Al-Sadr. End summary.

12. (C) Gunmen in a white KIA sport utility vehicle ambushed Al-Thabhwawi outside his home in the Al-Makroma district of Najaf shortly after 8 a.m. as he left for work on December 26, IP and SCIRI sources report. The cleric was taken by ambulance to Al-Hakim Hospital, where he died from his injuries at about 8:30 p.m. IP sources and local contacts report that the IP investigation is focused on both Sunni insurgents from outside the province and a local Sadr-affiliated cleric, Ayatollah Ahmed Al-Hassani Al-Baghdadi, whose office and home were raided by the IP on December 26 and 27.

13. (C) The killing of Thabhwawi is the most recent of several attempts on the lives of prominent Shi'a clerics. In June 2005, an unidentified sniper in Najaf attempted to assassinate Shaykh Khalid Al-Numani, a SCIRI-affiliated cleric who currently serves as the Deputy Provincial Council Chairman. In September 2005, gunmen assassinated Ayatollah Shaykh Mahdi Al-Attar, a high-ranking Dawa Party official, in Latifiyah, Babil Province, as he drove from Baghdad to his home in Najaf.

14. (C) Sayyid Al-Thabhwawi was at the time of his death working in the Al-Mahdi Establishment for Islamic Science and Research, a Shi'a theological research center and publishing house funded by Grand Ayatollah Ali Al-Sistani. Al-Thabhwawi joined the center, reportedly at the behest of Sistani, about six months ago after working in the Friday prayer office of Najaf SCIRI Head Shaykh Sadr Al-Deen Al-Qubani. Al-Thabhwawi, who was also affiliated with SCIRI, had reportedly been sent by Sistani to Baghdad in January 2005 to campaign for the Shi'a electoral list (at the time, ballot number 169, or the "Candle List") and had campaigned for the United Iraqi alliance (UIA, ballot number 555) in the December 15 election. Contacts indicate that Al-Thabhwawi was a moderate in favor of integrating Sunnis and ex-Baathists into the political process. Others report that Al-Thabhwawi had given the IP tips enabling them to capture wanted Najaf-based militants.

15. (C) Shortly after Al-Thabhwawi's death, the IP raided the Najaf home of Ayatollah Ahmed Al-Hassani Al-Baghdadi, a Sadr-affiliated extremist cleric who supports armed resistance to Coalition Forces and has issued fatwas condemning the recent election and declaring those who die fighting the Coalition Forces martyrs. Contacts report that Al-Baghdadi was opposed to the political process in general, having declared the current Iraqi Government an agent of the Coalition Forces, and to the United Iraqi Alliance (UIA, ballot number 555) in particular.

16. (C) The IP raided Al-Baghdadi's home and office a second time, on December 27. The cleric told the local media then that the raids were retaliation for his anti-Coalition stance and because he was suspected in Al-Thabhwawi's death. IP sources confirmed both raids, and Al-Baghdadi's suspected involvement in Al-Thabhwawi's killing as the reason for them. On December 28, about 80 Sadrists gathered outside Al-Baghdadi's office in Najaf's Old City to show their support and to condemn the raids. The same day, Moqtada Al-Sadr visited Al-Baghdadi in his home, declaring the raids an insult and promising to speak out about them during Friday prayers on December 30.

FONTENEAU